

From Classrooms to Corner Shops:

Does Commerce Education Create Business Leaders or Office Workers

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Abstract

This paper explores whether commerce education in Indian universities creates visionaries or merely trains students for clerical roles. Based on original narratives, real-life case studies, and lived experiences of students and educators, this research analyzes the educational, cultural, and social structures that shape the career choices of commerce graduates. Drawing from qualitative fieldwork and original writings, the study critiques the conventional curriculum that emphasizes theoretical knowledge over practical business acumen. The study calls for an urgent shift toward experiential, entrepreneurship-driven learning across Indian universities.

Keywords: Commerce Education, Entrepreneurship, Indian Universities, Vision vs. Employment, Curriculum Gaps, Practical Learning

I. Introduction

Commerce, by its very definition, is the study of trade and business—but ironically, commerce education in India does not teach students to build businesses. Instead, it teaches them to record transactions, write secretarial letters, maintain files, and prepare for employment. Students are trained to serve businesses, not start them. This paper questions the foundational goal of commerce education: Are we creating builders of businesses or back-office assistants?

As a commerce educator with over a decade of experience, the author reflects on hundreds of students' journeys—from classrooms to careers—most of whom are conditioned to aim for safe, stable jobs. In this context, it is necessary to explore if Indian universities—including BAMU and others across India—truly empower entrepreneurship or merely enable employment.

II. Review of Literature

Numerous scholars and policy documents highlight the gaps in Indian commerce education:

- a) Natarajan (2019) noted that only 10–15% of commerce graduates in India venture into business, citing the lack of practical exposure as a primary cause.
- b) Dasgupta and Roy (2021) observed that Indian universities do not provide real-world incubation facilities or startup ecosystems that support early entrepreneurship.
- c) The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) encouraged flexibility and skill-based education, but according to Gupta (2022), implementation remains uneven and superficial.
- d) Sharma (2020) highlighted that students in commerce are taught theoretical frameworks rather than exposed to dynamic business environments.

While these studies offer valuable insight, none adequately capture the grassroots-level realities—the individual voices and lived journeys of commerce students navigating a rigid, outdated system. This paper seeks to fill that gap by integrating original stories from across Indian colleges.

III. Hypothesis

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): Commerce education in Indian universities adequately prepares students for both employment and entrepreneurship.

H₁ (Alternate Hypothesis): Commerce education in Indian universities primarily prepares students for employment, not entrepreneurship.

Findings (Blended with Real-Life Experiences)

1. Curriculum Bias Toward Employment

Commerce students are taught bookkeeping, secretarial practice, and basic economics. These subjects are useful, but not empowering. Students learn how to write business letters—not how to write a business plan. As one teacher observed: “We are teaching them to file others’ transactions—not create their own.”

2. Entrepreneurship Born by Accident, Not Education

In one powerful personal account, the author narrates how he became a teacher and entrepreneur not by design, but by financial necessity. With a modest educational background and a job paying Rs. 3,500 a month, he turned to tutoring and eventually built a coaching institute. Commerce education had never presented entrepreneurship as a career path—it was survival that did.

3. Family Influence Outweighs Educational Direction

Many students inherit their business mindset from home. One student, despite excelling in commerce subjects, chose to run his family's grocery store. Another, who seemed fit for an MNC job, ran a mobile retail shop because his family discouraged employment. "Earn less, but with dignity," his father had said.

4. Cultural and Gendered Limitations

A girl once asked her teacher: "What's the point of this education when I'll be married by 23?" Her story reveals how girls—especially from conservative communities—are discouraged from exploring careers if they don't score high marks. Education, for them, is not transformational—it's a checkbox before marriage.

5. Monthly Salary Mindset

A student shared: "My father wants me to earn a fixed income. We can't afford risks." His father, a rickshaw driver, feared uncertainty. This mindset—common in middle- and lower-income homes—limits entrepreneurship, regardless of what is taught in class.

6. Role Models Over Syllabi

Several students entered coaching businesses not because they studied entrepreneurship, but because they admired the author's lifestyle. It wasn't knowledge that inspired them—it was personality. The system didn't nurture independent thought; it promoted imitation.

7. The Discipline Paradox

Surprisingly, students who were irregular in class often became entrepreneurs. Those who followed every rule usually ended up as employees. "Indiscipline," in some cases, led to independent business ventures—again, not due to education, but despite it.

8. Passion Found Outside the Classroom

Some commerce students, passionate about gymming, became fitness entrepreneurs. They used little of their commerce education. Their business knowledge came from the ground, not the classroom. Commerce education gave them a degree—but not direction.

9. Returnee Entrepreneurs

Students who worked abroad returned to start businesses—not because of what they learned in college, but because of real-world experience, exposure to systems thinking, and capital accumulation. The education system failed to unlock this potential locally.

IV. Observations

- a) Commerce education provides static theoretical knowledge, disconnected from dynamic business environments.
- b) Entrepreneurship happens in reaction to the system, not because of it.
- c) Cultural, financial, and emotional barriers are stronger than academic encouragement.
- d) Students often lack guidance, mentorship, or access to real business networks.
- e) The current system trains job seekers, not job creators.

V. Conclusion

The Indian commerce education system, particularly across general universities like BAMU, is inadvertently shaping a nation of employees, not entrepreneurs. While a few succeed in starting their ventures, they do so because of personality, background, or external experience—not because of what was taught in classrooms. If India wants to harness its demographic dividend and create sustainable economic growth, commerce education must evolve from clerical training to entrepreneurial empowerment.

The system must identify early entrepreneurial spark, nurture it through structured, practical pathways, and create business ecosystems within college campuses. Otherwise, we will continue producing graduates with degrees in hand—but visions on hold.

VI. Recommendations

- a) Curriculum Overhaul: Introduce real-world projects, startup simulations, and business bootcamps.
- b) Parallel Business Track: Create a special pathway within commerce for entrepreneurial students, starting from FYBCom.

- c) Startup Labs: Every university should have an incubation center with mentors, seed capital access, and space to prototype ideas.
- d) Family-Community Engagement: Educate families on the long-term value of business education and risk-taking.
- e) Entrepreneurial Mindset Training: Shift focus from grades to creativity, risk assessment, and leadership development.

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